

# **INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS**

## **United States Department of Agriculture**

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### **MORE FURS OF BETTER QUALITY AIM OF NEW RESEARCH PROGRAM**

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Current fashions are demanding more and more fur, despite a diminishing supply of wild animal pelts. To meet this demand, says Frank G. Ashbrook, in charge of fur resources for the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the fur industry is turning to fur-bearing animals raised in captivity.

Ten years ago the number of pelts sold by fur farmers or ranchers was insignificant. This year, Mr. Ashbrook estimates, about 300,000 silver fox pelts and 200,000 mink pelts will be sold from animals raised in wire pens or cages. These skins will represent nearly 20 percent of the value of all raw furs sold in the United States, or roughly \$13,000,000.

To assist fur farmers with problems that confront any new industry, Mr. Ashbrook announced today that Dr. Thora M. Plitt, formerly with the Bureau of Standards, has begun a research project designed to point the way to production of more furs of better quality.

The work is cooperative between the Bureau of Biological Survey and the Bureau of Animal Industry, and is under the immediate supervision of Dr. John I. Hardy, fiber specialist of the latter Bureau.

Doctor Plitt will investigate fur fiber structure and shape, pigment distribution, density, and relative distribution of underfur and guard hairs of such fur animals as silver foxes, minks, martens, and muskrats.

Little is known of the effect of nutrition and management practices on fur quality. The Department's animal nutrition studies in the past have been with herbivorous animals--cattle, hogs and sheep. With the exception of Karakul sheep, muskrats, and beavers, the principal fur-bearing animals are meat eaters.

Other countries--particularly Canada, Norway, and Sweden--are taking up fur farming. Many of their furs come to markets in the United States.

Fur production is necessary in the United States, Mr. Ashbrook points out, because the fur trade developed in this country with no thought of conservation. Fortunes were amassed by fur traders. America became the principal source of furs for the Old World. Today the United States produces only about one-third of the furs it uses, hence the present need both for conservation and increased production of fur animals.

Doctor Flitt also will take part in the studies of Karakul sheep which have been in progress at the National Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, Md., for the last seven years.

Three fashionable furs--~~broadtail~~, Persian Lamb, and caracul--come from Karakul lambs in varying ages of development. At present, practically all Karakul lambskins are imported from Soviet Russia and South Africa. Because of quarantine laws, few Karakuls for breeding purposes have come into the United States.

At the Research Center purebred Karakul rams have been crossed with Corriedale and Blackface Highland ewes. Ewes produced from the crosses are bred back to the purebred Karakul rams. Pelts from the fifth generation top cross have been judged by fur dealers to be as valuable as many of the pelts from purebred Karakul lambs. This makes it possible to obtain fur-bearing lambs at a rapid rate with breeding stock now in the country. Experiments at Beltsville include work with purebred Karakul ewes as well as purebred rams.